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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the nature of site-based decision making in Canadian schools. Its purpose is to refine theory on how site-based decision-making (SBDM) processes develop between the principal and the various stakeholders and to offer recommendations regarding how practitioners might proceed to enhance the collaborative decision-making process. Semistructured interviews were administered to 12 respondents from an elementary school, a junior-high school, and a senior-high school in a large Alberta suburban and rural district. The sample included the principal, two teachers, and the school council chairperson from the three schools. The findings indicate that the stage at which the participants are functioning in SBDM is important. The leadership style of the principal was a key factor in the success of SBDM; principals who shared information and were open, trustworthy, nonjudgmental, professionally ethical, and sensitive to multiple stakeholder views were considered to be effective leaders. The research uncovered six modes of information sharing: (1) one-on-one discussion with the principal, a colleague, or parent; (2) committee work; (3) survey; (4) participation at departmental meetings; (5) participation at staff meetings; and (6) participation at school-council meetings. SBDM required a higher commitment of time and emotion, and trust was an essential element in effective SBDM. Contains 22 references. (RJM)

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SITE-BASED DECISION-MAKING IN SCHOOLS

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Site-based Decision-making in Schools

Introduction of Political Ideology

The political climate, in Alberta during 1993 and 1994, provided the impetus for discussion regarding reform in the provincial publicly funded education system. The provincial government of the day initiated "round-table" meetings between itself and the public at large. The provincial government solicited public input regarding the nature of the changes that were needed to improve public education. From these round-table meetings, position papers were presented by the government; from these emerged new policy. Manzer (1994) believed that the political climate was ready for the public to accept changes because the collective perceptions of the public were such that "institutions of educational governance and designs of educational policies are subject to political contestation and require political determination" (p. 12).

Manzer (1994) also stated that "from its foundation in the middle of the nineteenth century, public education in Canada has been shaped by liberal political ideology" (p. 255). Manzer indicated that for ethical liberals the most important decisions about education are made by young people with the advice and guidance of adults; particularly principals, teachers, and parents. Hence, Manzer believed that the ethical liberal project required a massive decentralization of educational decision-making (p. 264).

Consequently, educational governance must be able to combine politics, policy, and administration in public schools, school boards, and provincial departments in a relationship of policy interdependence. Manzer (1994) also stated "the legitimacy of public education must be defined in terms of its capacity to provide for the universal development of individuals who live in a multidenominational, multilingual, and multicultural society; that entails educational pluralism" (p. 265). McGrath (1992) defined pluralism in public education as "collective participation in the decision-making process through some form of representation, either by a group acting on behalf of a constituency or by the educational institution reflecting the wishes of it's clientele" (p. 7). The importance of pluralism is highlighted by the introduction of school councils and site-based decision-making in Alberta schools. Manzer concurred with McGrath, that multi-stakeholder points of view are important factors for educators to understand in today's educational reform movement.

Manzer (1994) indicated that the public has accepted the current educational reforms of provincial financing, district reorganization and amalgamation, "back to the basics" curricular reorganization, and decentralized decision-making. The government's new site-based decision-

making policy (Alberta Education, 1996) allowed more diverse input into the process by stakeholders. Manzer (1994) stated that "in spite of the depressing drag caused by declining enrolments and fiscal crisis, provincial politicians and ministry officials, educational and community interest associations, and local school boards have worked steadily towards pluralizing public education in Canada" (p. 266). These reforms in education speak directly to the significance of this study.

Significance of the Study

Under recent restructuring initiatives, policies on "site-based decision-making" and "school councils" were mandated for all publicly funded schools in Alberta. These restructuring initiatives have changed the decision-making processes utilized by principals and their staff. According to Alberta Education (1996) the principal is the staff member who should oversee the entire operation of the school. Given this mandate, the principal has a very important role to play in site-based management and school decision-making.

The significance of this study has both theoretical and practical elements. Theoretical significance lies in the refinement of theory regarding how site-based-decision-making processes develop between the principal and the various stakeholders. Theory building involved synthesizing themes which emerged both inductively and deductively. The practical aspect of the research for schools hinges on the recommendations which emerged regarding how practitioners might proceed to enhance the collaborative decision-making processes, which ultimately benefit pupils in the classroom.

Method

Twelve respondents from an elementary school, a junior high school, and a senior high school were purposefully selected from a large Alberta suburban and rural district as the "multiple-sites" for this qualitative study. A purposive sample was selected to achieve an in-depth understanding of the selected individuals and to develop a deeper understanding of the decision-making process being studied. The sample included the principal, two teachers, and the school council chairperson from each of the three identified schools. In accordance with the philosophy of interpretive enquiry and the design of this study, the instrument employed for data collection was the semi-structured interview. All of the interviews were audio-recorded on standard cassette tapes then transcribed to text. This text was analyzed using a thematic approach. The richness of responses to the open-ended questions provided data on a number of themes related to the subproblems. As the researcher, I kept a field journal to record my thoughts and insights. Group member checks were later held with the respondents to confirm

my interpretations of the data.

Literature Overview

Site-based management in education is referred to by many names: school-based management, school-based leadership, building-based management, site-based decision-making, and decentralized decision-making. As the *School Resource Manual* (Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, 1995) noted, in general, under school-based management, decisions are made at the level closest to the issue being addressed. School-based management is based on two fundamental tenets. First, those closely affected by decisions ought to play a significant role in making those decisions. Second, educational reform efforts are most effective when carried out by people who feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the process.

Blanchard and Karr-Kidwell (1995) indicated that many kinds of educational reform, especially site-based management, have contributed to teacher empowerment. The success of these reforms, however, is contingent upon administrative leaders who are willing to share power. Conrad (1995) suggested that site-based management should be approached as an incremental process; furthermore Conrad recognized that every school system engages in some level of site-based decision-making. Implementation of this management concept in a school should, therefore, be gradual and flexible. Furthermore, boundaries that exist between site (i.e., school) and central office decisions will be changed as needed. As principals' management skills improve, more areas of control, previously the domain of central office, will be decentralized to schools.

In a similar vein, Hoy and Tarter (1992) postulated that school administrators should take into account the expertise that teachers bring to decision-making, their personal stake in the outcomes, and their acceptance of school goals. These authors stated that collaborative decision-making amongst administrators, teachers, and parents should not diminish the authority of the principal. There will be times when principals are in the best position to make decisions and other times when they are not. When appropriate, utilizing a team approach to solving problems will likely be more successful.

Other factors also influence how decision-making is accomplished in schools. Two of the most important influences, from an Alberta context, were: (a) Alberta Education policy 1.8.3 which mandated the implementation of "school councils" in 1996, and (b) Alberta Education policy 1.8.2 which mandated the adoption of "school-based decision-making" in all schools in 1996. These two policies are quasi-legal companion documents, which support each other, prescribe the guidelines by which publicly funded schools must incorporate multiple

stakeholders' views into the decision-making process. The following section discusses the importance of school councils and their emerging impact on how education will experience more multiple stakeholder input into the decision-making process.

School Councils

Rideout (1995) conducted a cross-country survey on school councils in Canada and reported that there was a growing trend towards granting school councils greater decision-making power in the policy areas of budget, personnel, and programming. Rideout also suggested that as part of a growing trend toward site-based management, which provides local communities with decision-making powers, there should be considerable input from school principals, staff, and parents. To spur greater involvement of multiple stakeholders, Neal (1991) stated that "when practicing decentralized management, each school should be required to have in place a functioning collaboration process which involves faculty, parents, students, and the principal" (p. 28). Neal stated further that the principal should be given special attention in the collaboration process, since he or she is accountable for the overall running of the school. Neal noted that if a good system of collaboration is followed, the principal will get sound advice. Neal contended that the issue of who is in charge is a "non-issue," because "the principal runs the school under the close scrutiny and advice of the faculty, parents, and students, but under the supervision of the superintendent" (p. 29). A preliminary conceptual framework, Figure 1, emerged from the literature review.

In order to obtain this input and collaboration from multiple stakeholders, Alberta Education (1996) brought forth policy 1.8.3 which stipulated that parents should have a meaningful role in the education of their children. The rationale was that few decisions in a school system could be made in isolation by one individual or one group. The policy stated that "parents, students, teachers, principals, superintendents, trustees, government, business and other community members are all participants in the educational endeavour and have a responsibility to work together, cooperate and communicate with one another" (p. 1). Policy 1.8.3 is supported in Section 17 of the *Alberta School Act* and legally reaffirms the rights of parents and the school community to have a purposeful role in the education of their children through the establishment of "school councils" (p. 1).

Although "parent advisory councils" (groups of parents who provide advice to the principals of their schools) were established and in place in the majority of schools in Alberta prior to policy 1.8.3 coming into force, the new regulations were in keeping with the move by Alberta Education to involve more stakeholder groups in the decision-making process at schools.

Prelimary Conceptual Framework

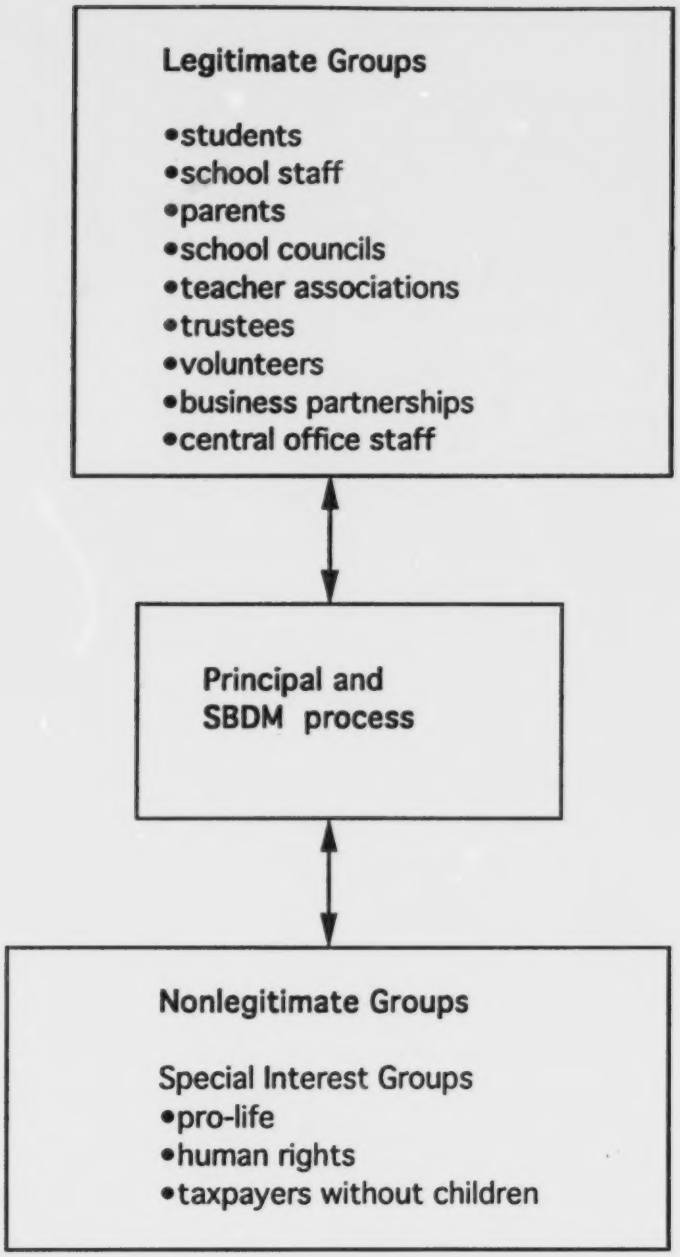

Figure 1. Stakeholders interaction with the principal and the decision-making process. The principal should consider the interests represented by each group, when resolving the decision-making process.

The policy 1.8.3 stated that "school councils will have a role in advising and consulting with the principal on any matter relating to the school" (1996, p. 1). This consultative role, and the second key factor in how decision-making has been influenced in schools, is supported in Alberta Education's policy 1.8.2 on school-based decision-making.

School-based Decision-making

The language used in this study is primarily based on definitions obtained from a review of the literature and from Alberta Education (1996) *Policy, Regulations and Forms Manual.* In this section the terms related to school-based decision-making in Alberta are reviewed, including: (a) policy 1.8.2, (b) school-based decision-making, (c) community, and (d) stakeholder. Carver (1990) stated that understanding policies is important "because policies permeate and dominate all aspects of organizational life, they present the most powerful lever for the exercise of leadership" (p. 28).

Policy 1.8.2

School-Based Decision-Making.

A school and its community shall have the authority and the support to make decisions which directly impact on the education of students and shall be accountable for the results. (Alberta Education, 1996, p. 2.)

Alberta Education implemented this policy with the belief that "major decisions about policies, instructional programs and services, and the allocation of funds to support them must be made collaboratively" (1996, p. 1). Alberta Education's intention was that school-based decision-making should involve a diverse group of individuals in a collaborative process. This group would consist of the superintendent, the principal, the teachers, the instructional support staff, the parents, and the community. The decisions made at the local school, are to be consistent with policies of the elected board of trustees. This collaborative endeavour was meant to enable schools "to be responsive to local needs" (p. 1).

Alberta Education (1996, p. 1) stated that "under section 15 of the *School Act*, and the direction set by the *Three-Year Business Plan,* the principal is the key educational leader at the school level, who will provide leadership in successful school-based decision-making." This policy statement, 1.8.2, provided the legal framework for allowing multiple-stakeholder input into the decisions that occur at the school level. The policy also stated that "principals must work with parents, teachers and members of the community to establish a school-based decision-making process to develop school policies and budgets as well as establish the scope of

the school program and extra-curricular activities" (p. 1). With this policy, Alberta Education legitimized the involvement of parents and the community in the decisions that affect their children's education.

Alberta Education (1996) stated that school-based decision-making "involves the whole school community in teaching and learning in order to ensure high levels of student achievement" (p. 2). The document also indicated that "school-based decision-making is a process through which major decisions are made at the school level about policies, instructional programs and services, and how funds are allocated to support them" (p. 2).

Community

Alberta Education (1996) stated that community refers to "a school's students, their parents and other community-based support elements available to the school" (p. 2). An example of community-based support elements are the local business people willing to participate on the school council or to provide work experience placements for students.

Stakeholder

Although the term "stakeholder" is not specifically defined by Alberta Education (1996), it is referred to in the literature and its meaning in the Alberta context is important. A stakeholder can refer to any or all of the following participants in the educational endeavour who have a responsibility or stake in the education of students, namely: parents, students, teachers, principals, superintendents, trustees, government, business, and other community members. This definition of stakeholder was crafted from the background information provided in the Alberta Education policy 1.8.3 (p. 1).

Summary of the Research Findings

The major findings are summarized in this section. The research findings are organized in accordance with the three specific subproblems which guided this study.

Subproblem One: What Practices are used in the Decision-making process?

Site-based decision-making (SBDM) appears to be a decentralization of decision-making powers and accountability to the school level. SBDM was seen as a collaborative process focused on sharing information and gathering input for decisions amongst multiple stakeholders. Peters and Richards (1995) stated that the government of Alberta expected collaborative decentralized decision-making to occur at the school level with increased involvement of parents, the community, and business (p. 21).

One of the key factors in successful implementation of SBDM was trust amongst educational stakeholders. Trust among the stakeholders must exist so that decisions can be made

in the best interests of student learning. The identification of trust as a factor supports the research conducted by da Costa and Riordan (1997), Fullan (1993), and Sergiovanni (1991).

The leadership style of the principal was also identified as an important contributor to effective SBDM. A transformational leadership style, where the personal values and beliefs of the leader are viewed as key leadership qualities, was found to be preferential. Sergiovanni (1991) and Hoy and Miskel (1996) also supported the importance of the transformational leadership style of the principal to the "social well being" of the school.

The practices used in schools were new and evolving over time due to the recent provincial government policy initiatives, specifically: mandatory school councils and site-based decision-making. This finding supports Peters and Richards' (1995) research on the restructuring of education.

Other political factors influenced the decision-making process, namely: cuts to education funding in general, decentralization of funding to schools, accountability of schools for academic results and fiscal management, and consolidation of smaller school systems into larger school districts. This finding also concurs with the research conducted by Peters and Richards (1995) on restructuring of education.

"Pluralism" was identified as participation by multiple stakeholders in SBDM in publicly funded schools in Alberta. The involvement of multiple stakeholders in SBDM supports the research of McGrath (1992) and Peters and Richards (1995).

An increase in workload resulted from a shift in power, accountability, and money from central office to the school staff, primarily to the principal. There was a notable increase in the amount of committee work for all participants, a need to share information with stakeholders and to collect input from teachers, parents, and principals. This finding supports the literature put forth by Neal (1991) and Quinn (1996). There were conflicting opinions from two of the participants that the actual workload had not changed, but rather, the intensity and commitment had increased for the decisions that now had to be made at the school level.

"Time constraints" became a concern for all of the stakeholders. Quinn (1996) indicated that the extra workload and time commitments were considered serious factors for many stakeholders to consider (p. 29). The change in workload increased the demand on participants' time in order for them to become involved in the decision-making process. Another contributing factor to time constraints was the resulting impact of staff reductions due to government funding cuts to education. There were simply fewer staff left to do the work required. Participants wanted time to become familiar and comfortable with their new roles;

furthermore, they were not prepared to assume greater involvement in the process as it presently exists.

Categories for the stakeholders were originally identified in the conceptual framework, Figure 1, and were further distinguished by three categories previously not in the literature. An Expanded conceptual framework, Figure 2, emerged from the data and was incorporated as emergent theory. "Primary legitimate stakeholders" were identified as: (a) students, (b) staff, (c) parents, and (d) the school council. "Secondary legitimate stakeholders" were identified as: (a) business partnerships, (b) volunteers, (c) teacher associations, (d) educational special interest groups (e.g., Canadian Parents for French), (e) school board trustees, (f) central office staff, and (g) government. "Secondary nonlegitimate stakeholders" were identified as: non-educational special interest groups and taxpayers without children.

Subproblem Two: Who Provides Input Into Decisions and Within What Parameters?

Principals, teachers, and chairpersons all stated that they had opportunities to provide input into decisions at their school. This input included: (a) one-on-one discussion with the principal, a colleague, or parent, (b) committee work, (c) survey, (d) participation at department meetings, (e) participation at staff meetings, (f) and participation at school council meetings. The input covered a broad range of areas including: (a) school budgets, (b) school and district policy, and (c) school philosophy, mission statements, and goals.

Critical influencing factors, or as Neal (1991) called "parameters," impacted on the decision-making process at the school level. These factors include legal documents (e.g., the School Act), related regulations, and policies of the Board and the school. This finding supports the work of Holdaway and Ratsoy (1991), Neal (1991), Peters and Richards (1995), and Quinn (1996).

The ramifications of government cuts to education funding, limited the choices for all stakeholders to make when addressing ways to improve instruction for students. Money was linked directly to acquiring additional support for computer technology, textbooks, library resources, educational assistants, and additional staff to lower student to teacher ratios. Participants noted that the scope of school-based decisions was limited by strict adherence to budget constraints. This finding concurs with the arguments, on restructuring in education, put forth by Holdaway and Ratsoy (1991), Neal (1991), Peters and Richards (1995), and Quinn (1996).

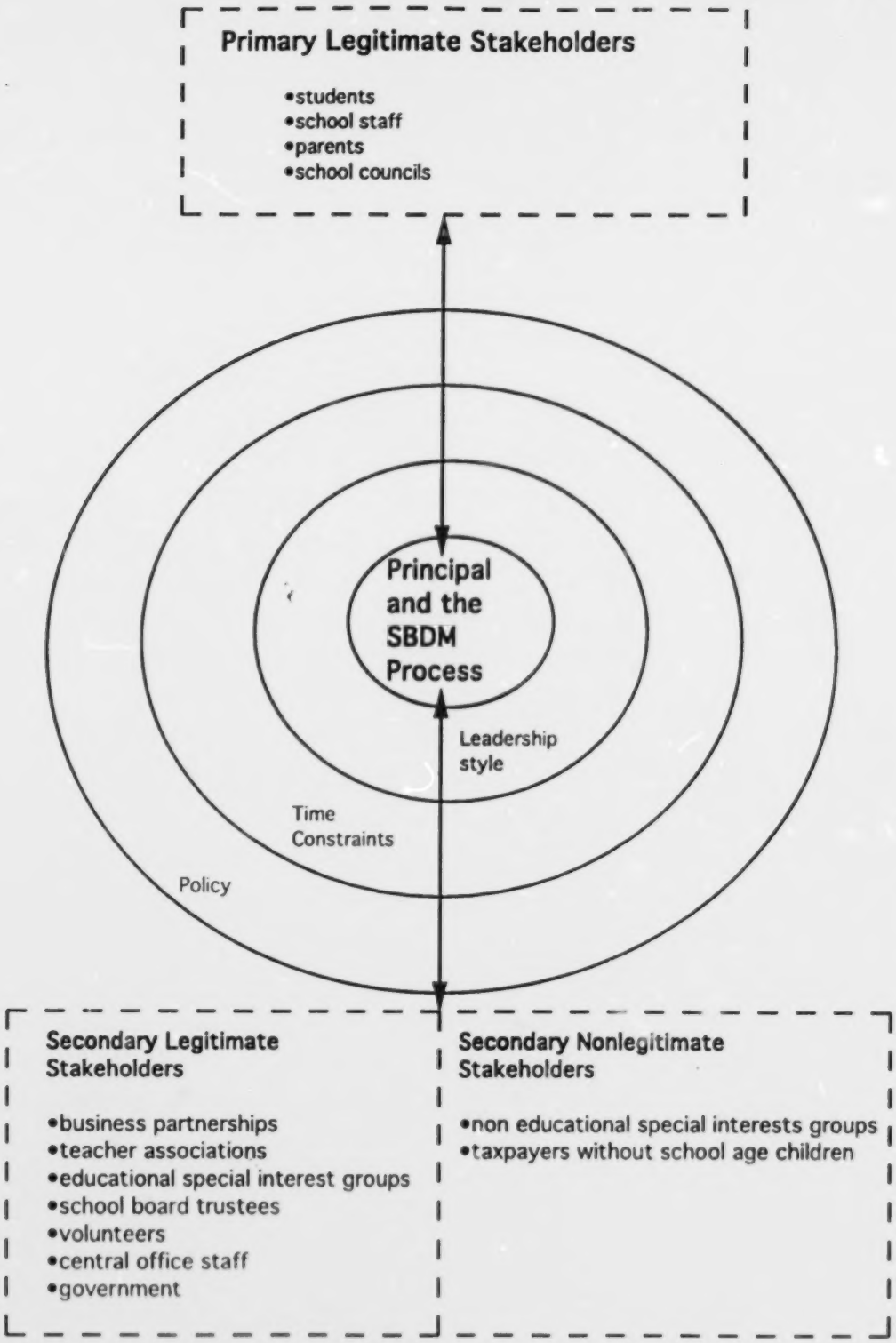

Figure 2. Primary Legitimate Stakeholders', Secondary Legitimate Stakeholders', and Secondary Nonlegitimate Stakeholders' interaction with the principal and the school-based decision-making process.

Overall, participants were satisfied with the decision-making process their schools had established. Participants felt a strong sense of ownership for their decisions, but commented that there was limited room to manoeuvre within strict school budgets, consequently, recommendations to improve the learning environment for students were difficult to enact.

The implementation of SBDM has led to more demands being placed on principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons. Due to these demands, participants wanted access to the SBDM process in areas which: (a) directly affect them, (b) they choose to have involvement in, and (c) their expertise is useful.

There was an evolving issue concerning the future role of school councils. Specifically, that volunteer school councils should not become "mini-school boards." School councils should recognize (a) their levels of competence to make informed decisions, and (b) their abilities to commit the time to take on greater responsibilities. School councils must recognize their limitations and set reasonable targets and objectives. This finding concurs with Peters and Richards (1995) who indicated that "governance" was an issue that should remain the domain of school boards (p. 22).

Subproblem Three: How Can the Decision-making Process be Enhanced From the Perspective of the Respondents?

The characteristics of principals, teachers, and chairpersons which enhance the decision-making process are summarized, as four themes, in Figure 3, namely: (a) openness, (b) sensitivity, (c) principles, and (d) work ethic. The following four findings concur with research by Fullan (1993), Hoy and Miskel (1996), and Sergiovanni (1991).

Stakeholders demonstrating characteristics of "openness" enhanced the SBDM practice in their schools. The participants used terms such as "keeping an open mind, sharing information, sharing expertise, providing opinions, listening to multiple points of view, understanding the bigger picture, accessibility, and not having a hidden agenda."

Stakeholders demonstrating characteristics of "sensitivity" enhanced the SBDM process. The participants used terms such as "respects privacy and confidentiality, supportive and understanding of multiple points of view, advisor, nonjudgemental, and allows for relevant input without over involving stakeholders."

The "principles" or values that stakeholders embody which enhance SBDM were identified as: (a) trustworthiness, (b) honesty, (c) positiveness, (d) morality and ethics, and (e) working for the good of all the students.

A strong "work ethic" would spread the duties amongst more stakeholders, thereby,

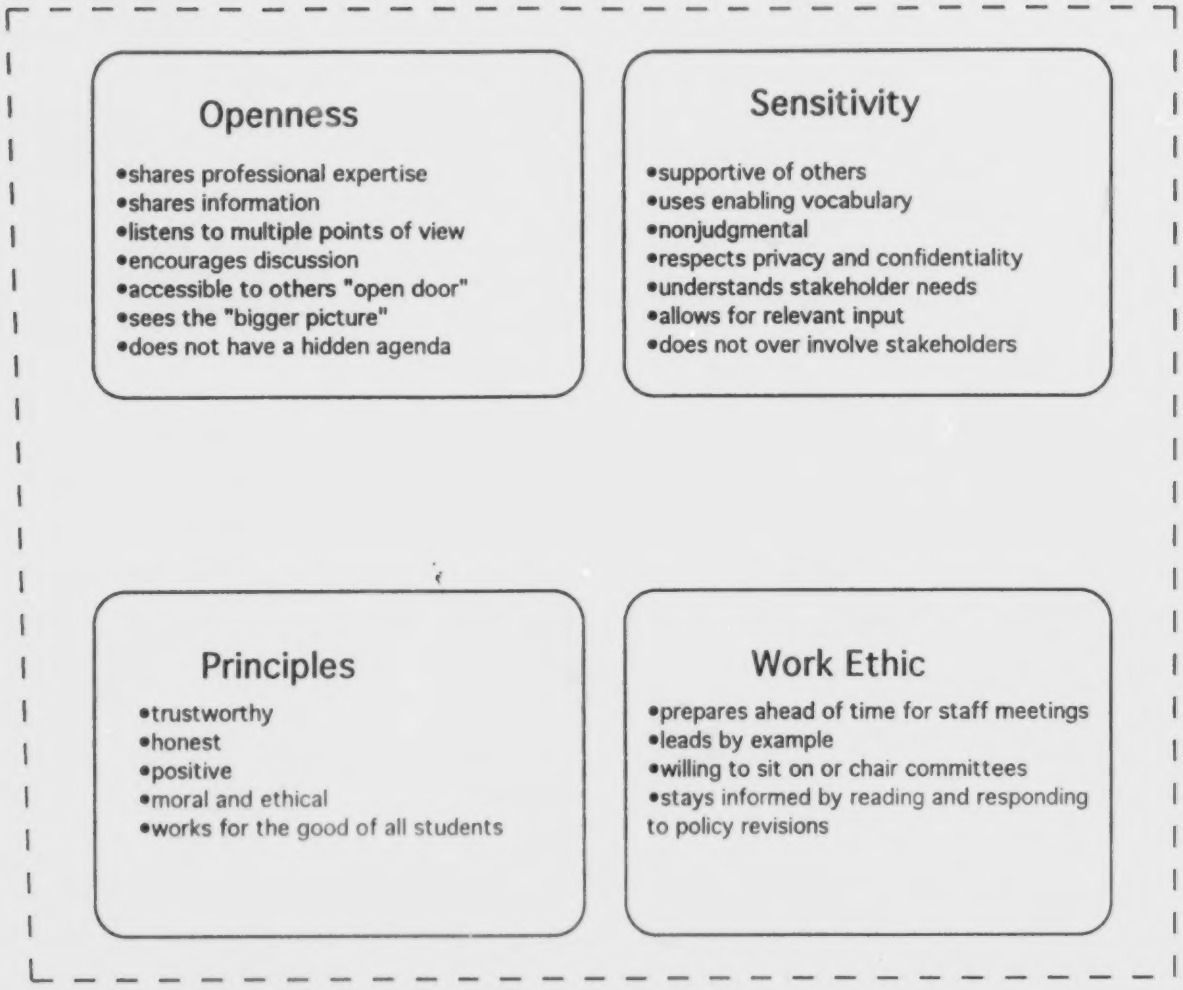

Figure 3. Characteristics of principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons which enhance SBDM. Four themes emerged as: (a) openness, (b) sensitivity, (c) principles, and (d) work ethic.

Note: The dashed line box surround the four themes indicate all four themes encompass characteristics which enhance SBDM. The "bullets" within each theme box indicate the descriptors which explain the specific elements of each theme.

enhancing SBDM. This work ethic complements the previous themes and focuses on the importance of completing the task at hand. It was important that all stakeholders be prepared to undertake the work that is inherent in SBDM. Participants wanted their colleagues to "share in the workload." The participants, whether they be teacher, principal, or school council chair, wanted their colleagues to be prepared to work. They described elements of their work ethic as: (a) prepares ahead of time for meetings, (b) leads by example, (c) willing to sit on or chair committees, and (d) stays informed by reading and responding to requests for input into policy concerns.

Conclusions

The following statements and generalizations that follow are the conclusions reached based on the findings of this study.

The research data support the notion that the stage at which the participants are functioning in SBDM is an important factor to consider. Practitioners or researchers reading this study should be aware that participants were in their first year of implementing site-based decision-making in their district and may find the data indicative of the early stages which stakeholders encounter. Stakeholder perceptions regarding the process will change over time, as they gain experience with their roles and each other. Due to the evolving nature of site-based decision-making, in Delta Regional School District, new procedures and policies will impact on the decision-making process.

It was found that critical influencing factors need to be clearly outlined for all stakeholders involved in the decision-making process. Decision-making is not always a democratic process based on multiple points of view. There are legal and ethical factors that provided a boundary for sound decision-making. Decisions which are ethical, based on sound educational practices, and constructed on the best interests of the students are considered to be "good" decisions.

The leadership style of the principal was found to be a key factor in the success of site-based decision-making. Principals who share information, are open, trustworthy, nonjudgemental, professionally ethical, and sensitive to multiple stakeholder views are considered to be effective leaders. These leaders exhibited traits of what Hoy and Miskel (1996) described as "transformational leadership."

The participants, in this study, had multiple avenues to provide input into decisions in their schools. The findings Indicated six modes of information sharing: (a) one-on-one discussion with the principal, a colleague, or parent; (b) committee work; (c) survey; (d)

participation at department meetings; (e) participation at staff meetings; and (f) participation at school council meetings. Although the participants felt ownership for their decisions, the decisions that they could make were often circumscribed by limited financial resources. Under the present decision-making process utilized in their schools participants were not interested in taking on more decision-making roles.

The research data support the concept that stakeholders do not want to become involved in all decisions. Stakeholders do want to become involved in decisions: (a) which directly affect them, (b) which they choose to have involvement in, and (c) where their expertise is useful. The study provided support for the Hoy and Miskel (1996) model, for determining when principals should use shared decision-making. As principals involve stakeholders in making decisions located in the stakeholders' "zone of acceptance" participation will be less effective and as principals involve stakeholders in making decisions clearly outside of their "zone of acceptance," participation will be more effective.

The research findings indicate that political factors played a role in the process schools now use to make educational decisions. Because of the "conservative move to the right" by the provincial government, restructuring occurred in Alberta's schools during the early 1990s. Cuts to education funding were initiated and school systems were reorganized into larger school districts, thus reducing the total number of school boards. Decentralization of funds, based on student population, were targeted to go directly to the schools. Provincial policy was implemented to allow for more pluralistic involvement of multiple stakeholders in the decision-making process at the local school level.

The research findings further suggest that the decision-making process became more time consuming and emotionally intense for the participants. It involved an increase in workload due to committee work and the collaborative nature of shared decision-making. Furthermore, accountability and responsibility for decisions were shifted from central office to the school level. This shift in accountability and responsibility became the basis for the new role description for the principal. The principal was seen as being ultimately in charge of the total operation of the school.

The research data indicate the issue of trust is crucial in effective SBDM. Without "trust" in the principal, and trust among the principal, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders there cannot be an effective decision-making process. All stakeholders have multiple points of view and must ultimately trust the principal to make ethical, professional decisions, based on the best interests of the students.

The findings support the view that school staff should be open, sensitive, principled, and share in the work that is inherent in SBDM. It is also important to have a holistic understanding of the entire school district in order to ensure that all schools can grow from the collective knowledge of the multiple stakeholders.

The data indicated that the initial conceptual framework derived from the literature was inadequate given the context of Delta Regional School Division. SBDM was a collaborative process involving input from multiple stakeholders. The multiple stakeholders were identified as: (a) primary legitimate, (b) secondary legitimate, and (c) secondary nonlegitimate.

Recommendations and Implications

The conclusions drawn in this research lead to several recommendations, which, if implemented, have serious implications. These recommendations and implications are discussed in the following section according to their relevance to practice, and research.

Recommendations for Practice

From the conclusions presented emerged six recommendations for practice. The first four relate directly to schools and school jurisdictions. The fifth is directed at teacher and administrator professional development. The last recommendation for practice is directed to university faculties and departments offering educational administration and leadership programs.

It was concluded that schools and school staff should not become islands unto themselves. As one of the participants noted, it is important to remember that there is the larger perspective of the entire school and school district to consider. Continually focusing on only your own department or school may not allow district initiatives to be effective. In particular, students of varied academic abilities require programs to meet their individual needs, and utilizing the resources of the entire district may allow for system programs to meet these needs. It is further recommended that schools use an approach, where all schools support each other, as parts of a whole that must work together. A metaphorical example would explain the strength of this recommendation. If the school district could be considered the "human body" and each school part of the body, such as a "liver, kidney, heart, or lung." To function well all the organs must be healthy and working in harmony. When there is a problem with one or more of the organs, the entire body must work together to heal itself, or the body will threaten to destroy itself.

The constraints on all stakeholders' "time" and "involvement" were identified as significant factors for participants to address with the implementation of SBDM. In order to

make more efficient use of time, it is recommended that the decision-making process be streamlined to allow participants the opportunity to be involved where they have the commitment, expertise, and desire to be involved in the process. It is apparent from the research data that stakeholders do not want to be involved in all decisions; and that principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons all have a different primary job description where their energy should be focused. To put this in context: (a) teaching staff should be focusing on front line work with students, preparing lesson plans, marking student work, and evaluating students; (b) parents are important advisors to the principal; and (c) the principal is legally accountable for the operation of the entire school. Collaboration is important, but if the process used is extremely time consuming and has everyone involved at all stages and on numerous committees, then the primary focus of participants' energy will not be on front line interaction with students.

There are decisions that must be made by the principal and should not involve staff. Teachers realize that they are not able to contribute to all decisions and that they do not have the time to become involved. In these circumstances, teachers expect their principals to make decisions. Hoy and Miskel (1996) indicated that in noncollaborative circumstances teachers have neither the interest nor the expertise to contribute to the decision. Yet there is a strong norm about involving teachers in all sorts of decisions that school administrators often feel constrained to involve teachers regardless of their knowledge or interest. Such ritual is dysfunctional and illogical. (p. 295)

It is recommended that school and district policies clarify who has the authority and responsibility for making final decisions. Also important are that the parameters of the decision be clearly stated before the decision-making process begins. This should focus the participants input quickly and more effectively.

It is recommended that school councils not become involved in issues of governance, which are currently the domain of school boards. The respondent school council chairpersons identified relevance and expertise as factors which should be considered. The respondent chairpersons also identified "commitment" of the school council membership as another factor which should be considered. A yearly turnover in executive members would cause a lack of vision and lack of commitment to long term goals.

It is further recommended that inservice education for principals, teachers, school council executives, central office staff, and trustees be conducted in a joint professional development activity where the following issues are addressed: (a) collaborative decision-

making, (b) pertinent legislation that defines the legal parameters for decision-making (e.g., the School Act, Alberta School Boards Association's Roles and Responsibilities of School Councils and Trustees, and School Council's Manual), and (c) district and school parameters that will guide decision-making (i.e., what areas can stakeholders make decisions on and within what parameters?).

It is also recommended that universities continue, when educating future school administrators, to include instruction in the following areas as identified in conclusions 1, 2, and 3: (a) theories and models of decision-making; (b) theories of transformational leadership; (c) theories of ethics; and (d) policy design, implementation, and analysis.

Recommendations for Research

Based on the research data it would be worthwhile to further explore the experiences of other participants who are at different stages of implementing SBDM. It is recommended that this study be replicated in different locations and times, whereby, new insights could be examined from different contextual perspectives. Further research is required which should include more schools and more participants in each school and school council in the same and other school districts.

The political climate in the early 90's led to a conservative movement to restructure education in Alberta. It is recommended that a study be conducted to explore the political decisions that lead to the formation and implementation of new policies. These policies could be further researched as to their design and if they were effectively implemented.

With all of the changes that have occurred in publicly funded education, in Alberta, during 1993 to 1998, it is recommended that research be done on teacher and principal satisfaction. Further research could examine the new roles and additional duties that impact upon educational staff because of site-based management.

With "time" being identified as an important factor in the lives of educators, it is recommended that research be conducted on what the impact of site-based management has on classroom instruction. The question of "do classroom teachers have sufficient time to devote their mental and physical energy to teaching students?" needs to be addressed.

It is recommended that the role of school councils be researched, in light of their expanded role, in today's pluralistic decision-making educational context. If all stakeholders are to have input into the education of students, how will issues of power, authority and influence be managed?

The most critical of the recommendations for future research is the extension of the

conceptual framework developed from the literature review. The research data suggested that modifications be made to the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1. An expanded conceptual framework, Figure 2, emerged from the data and was incorporated as emergent theory. This conclusion demonstrated that SBDM was a collaborative process involving input from multiple stakeholders. The "primary legitimate stakeholders" were identified by the respondents as: (a) students, (b) school staff, (c) parents, and (d) the school council. The respondents identified the primary legitimate stakeholders as being those individuals or groups that have daily involvement with the students in their school. The tenth conclusion demonstrated that the respondents acknowledged that other, "secondary," stakeholders were interested in gaining access to the decision-making process at the school site. These secondary stakeholders were further broken down into legitimate and nonlegitimate groups. Secondary legitimate stakeholders were identified as: (a) business partnerships, (b) volunteers, (c) teacher associations, (d) educational special interest groups (e.g., Canadian Parents for French), (e) school board trustees, (f) central office staff, and (g) government. Secondary nonlegitimate stakeholders were identified as: non-educational special interest groups and taxpayers without children.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The implication of the first recommendation is that a school district which ensures that the educational needs of all district students are met will be providing equitable service. A school district is a complex organization; a competitive approach to education may temporarily allow schools to attract specific types of students, but over time, programming for a diverse range of students will deteriorate. Only the larger schools or schools in a position to access additional funding from business will survive a competitive approach. These inequities among schools will result in "have and have not" schools with many students not having their specific needs met.

The participants viewed their primary focus as the education of students in their school. With this student centred focus and the demanding workload the participants therefore concerned themselves mainly with the interactions of the primary stakeholders. The implications of the recommendations for theory are two fold. First, if schools focus their attention on only their primary legitimate stakeholders they may under-value the expertise provided by secondary legitimate stakeholders. Secondly, that if schools ignore the desires of secondary nonlegitimate stakeholders they may feel societal pressure to listen. I believe the dilemma is how to be aware of secondary nonlegitimate stakeholders, when to use the expertise

of secondary legitimate stakeholders and how to remain focused on the primary legitimate stakeholders.

Based on the recommendations for theory two policies implemented by Alberta Education (1996) were designed to encourage input by multiple stakeholders into the decision-process: (a) Alberta Education policy 1.8.3 mandating the implementation of school councils, and (b) Alberta Education policy 1.8.2 mandating "school-based decision-making" for all schools. These two policies have implications for theory development by prescribing guidelines by which publicly funded schools must incorporate multiple stakeholders' views into the decision-making process. These two documents also established the principal as the individual responsible for the overall operation of the school and the one to establish a collaborative SBDM process. Furthermore, the literature (e.g., Blanchard & Karr-Kidwell, 1995; Boyan, 1988; Dubin, 1991; Estler, 1988; Holdaway & Ratsoy, 1991; Quinn, 1996; Rideout, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1991; and Williams, Harold, & Southworth, 1997) also identified the pivotal role of the principal in school decision-making. For the above reasons, I chose to place the principal at the centre of the initial conceptual framework design, and to retain this category in the new conceptual framework in Figure 2.

The recommendations for theory suggest there are parameters and factors to be encountered by stakeholders when making decisions at their schools. This recommendation was used to construct the concentric circles in the emergent conceptual framework (Figure 2) which denote that the stakeholders encounter parameters and factors which must be dealt with when interacting with the decision-making process. The concentric circles are metaphorically "layers of an onion" which stakeholders must "go through" when attempting to provide input or influence a decision.

Conclusion and Future Role of the Principal

Due to the political factors of restructuring and decentralizing education in Alberta, the role of the principal has changed. The principalship has become the focal point for students, parents, teachers, the Alberta Teachers' Association, business, trustees, superintendents, government, and the community at large to express their views and influence decisions at the local school level. This pluralistic perspective is extremely difficult to lead. since each individual or group has their wants and desires at the forefront of their point of view. Often these views are diametrically opposed. The parent may want smaller class sizes, while the government wants to control spending and keep class sizes at a level they deem appropriate. This places the principal in a dilemma, because parents are told that education dollars are

decentralized to the school, based on student enrollment, and that the principal has the flexibility to organize the school accordingly to the specific needs of the community. What the parents do not understand are the limiting factors which define parameters that cannot be changed. The principal cannot simply reallocate funds to hire additional staff. The funding which is allocated to schools is usually only sufficient to run the school with the fewest number of staff required. A principal cannot just pull money "out of thin air."

The "power" to make autonomous decisions based on the best interest of the students is becoming extremely complex for principals. The recent reforms have forced principals to become "managers of money" and has severely limited their time to act as instructional leaders. In Williams, Harold, and Southworth (1997) one principal stated that site-based management has "turned the role of the principal upside down" (p. 629). Too many stakeholders are "drawing the principal away" from student-centred issues. The principalship has become a contested position of interaction among all of the stakeholders, and this interaction has increased the principals' workload, time commitments, and stress levels. Yet, my experience with decentralization, and interaction with principals' over the past five years, has led me to believe that not one would want to return to the more centralized management system. Williams, Harold, and Southworth concurred with my view and stated accordingly: "With all its challenges, they [principals] seem to prefer the choices and autonomy that the new system [SBDM] provides over the limitations that are inherent in complex bureaucracies" (p. 629).

How will the role of principal evolve over the next decade? An important factor will be the degree to which the provincial government initiates policy which places school councils in positions of influence at the school site. If school councils become more like "mini-school boards," then principals will become more like "superintendents." The issue here is how will governance of schools be managed over the next decade? The school council chairpersons in this study were not interested in taking on school board governance responsibilities. If the provincial government listens to these parents, then governance will remain the role of school boards. The position of principal will probably evolve into an executive administrative position, outside of the teachers' union, with the principals' as managers of schools. Only time will tell if these predictions come to fruition.

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